

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FROM ENVOY TO VATICAN OFFICE

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, VT

SUBJECT: VATICAN ACTS TO STOP SPECULATION ON POPE PAUL'S RESIGNATION

1. DURING THE SUMMER THERE HAS BEEN MUCH JOURNALISTIC SPECULATION REGARDING THE POPE'S HEALTH AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT HE MIGHT RESIGN THIS YEAR. SPECULATION HAS BEEN BASED ON SEVERAL FACTORS, INCLUDING FACT THAT POPE PAUL THIS SUMMER HAS REMAINED UNUSUALLY QUIET AT CASTEL GANDOLFO: HE HAS NOT RETURNED TO ROME BY HELICOPTER TO GIVE HIS WEEKLY GENERAL AUDIENCES, AND HE HAS DRastically CURTAILED THE NUMBER OF VISITORS HE HAS RECEIVED. IN ADDITION, POPE PAUL WILL REACH 80 ON SEPTEMBER 26 AND SOME SPECULATED THAT HE WOULD RESIGN GIVEN HIS STATE OF HEALTH (POPE PAUL IS SUFFERING FROM ARTHRITIS OF LOWER LIMBS) AND THE RULE HE ESTABLISHED THAT CARDINALS REACHING AGO 80 LOSE THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN THE CONCLAVE FOR NEW POPE. THE POPE HIMSELF FUELED THE SPECULATION WHEN ON AUGUST 15, HE SAID PUBLICLY (ROME 13469) THAT BECAUSE OF HIS AGE HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER HE WOULD BE CELEBRATING THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION AGAIN AND THAT HE SAW "THE THRESHOLD OF THE OTHER WORLD DRAW NEAR ME."

2. FACED WITH ALMOST DAILY SPECULATION IN THE ITALIAN
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PRESS ABOUT THE IMMINENT RESIGNATION OF THE POPE, THE VATICAN COUNTERATTACKED VIGOROUSLY. THE VATICAN PRESS SPOKESMAN ON AUGUST 29, TERMED SPECULATION AS BASED ON "FANTASIES" AND TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE POPE HAD NO INTENTION OF RESIGNING. THE VATICAN'S L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO IN HARSH EDITORIALS AUGUST 31 AND SEPTEMBER 2, CRITICIZED "INCIVILITY" OF PRESS "CAMPAIGN." TO FORTIFY ITS POSITION, VATICAN WORDS

WERE COUPLED WITH ACTION: THE POPE'S SCHEDULE AT CASTEL GANDOLFO WAS BEEFED UP--HE RECEIVED SPANISH PRIME MINISTER SUARES ON SEPTEMBER 2; THE BISHOPS OF UMBRIA, ABRUZZO AND MOLISE ON SEPTEMBER 5; HE WENT TO THE NEARBY TOWN OF ALBANO TO CELEBRATE MASS ON SEPTEMBER 4; AND ON SEPTEMBER 3, VATICAN ANNOUNCED THAT THE POPE WOULD GO TO PERCARA ON SEPTEMBER 17, TO ATTEND THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE ITALIAN CHURCH'S EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS--THE LONGEST TRIP THAT THE ROMAN PONTIFF HAS MADE SINCE 1972.

3. COMMENT: THESE VATICAN ACTIONS HAVE EFFECTIVELY STILLED THE SPECULATION THAT THE POPE'S HEALTH IS DETERIORATING AND THAT HE WOULD BE RESIGNING SOON. THE JOURNALISTIC FOCUS HAS NOW SHIFTED TO THE CURRENT MEETING (SEPT. 5-8) OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE VATICAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, THE UPCOMING ITALIAN EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS SEPTEMBER 11-17, AND THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS SEPTEMBER 30-OCTOBER 31. THE PERMANENT COUNCIL'S WORK IS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST BECAUSE IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT THIS BODY WILL EXAMINE AND PROVIDE DIRECTIVES REGARDING THE ITALIAN CHURCH'S POSITION ON THE NOVEMBER 1977 LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ELECTIONS; THE QUESTION OF ABORTION; THE REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT, AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAW 382 WHICH TRANSFERS TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS (MANY OF THEM IN THE HANDS OF "RED GIUNTAS") OF SEVERAL POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WHICH THE VATICAN CONSIDERS WILL CREATE AN "ENORMOUS CHAOS," PARTICULARLY IN THE FIELD OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PUBLIC ASSISTANCE WHERE THE CHURCH'S TRADITIONAL ROLE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE AND MIGHT BE AFFECTED NEGATIVELY.GARDNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POPE, PRESS COMMENTS, ALLEGATIONS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 09-Sep-1977 12:00:00 am
Decapton Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977ROME14677
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Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
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Executive Order: N/A
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Film Number: D770328-0267
Format: TEL
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
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